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UNCLAS HO CHI MINH CITY 000994

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/BCLTV, DRL/IRF

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: PASTOR TRUONG RELEASED FROM THE ASYLUM WITH STRINGS  
ATTACHED

REF: A) HCMC 816 and previous; B) Hanoi 1389

1. (SBU) The lawyer representing Pastor Than Van Truong informed us on September 17 that Dong Nai officials earlier that day had released Truong from the mental hospital to which he had been involuntarily committed for nearly a year. On September 17 and again on September 19, we spoke with Truong and his wife at their home in Dong Nai Province. Truong said he was in good health and spirits.

2. (SBU) Truong told us that, as a precondition for release, he was required to sign a document drafted by the Dong Nai Prosecutor's Office, entitled "Minute of Notification of Decision on Termination of Forced Treatment Measure." That document stated that Truong had a delusional disorder, had been treated and become temporarily stable, and therefore was allowed to go home for further treatment. He was given a hospital discharge paper with the same diagnosis and a prescription for medicine to take at home (Haldol, the same anti-delusional drug he was given in the hospital). Truong said that police officials were present at his discharge.

3. (SBU) Truong said that the officials would not give him a copy of the "Minute of Notification" document although he had made repeated requests. He was not allowed to write on the document that he disagreed with the diagnosis. He was told that he could file a complaint later if he wanted. According to Truong, police told him that there were no travel or other restrictions on him following his release. Truong said that he had traveled directly to HCMC to visit his daughter and some religious friends. He said that he was "surprised" when he noticed that he was followed by two plainclothes policemen as he visited the house church of Mennonite Pastor Nguyen Hong Quang on September 18.

4. (SBU) Comment: Truong's lawyer told us that he believed his client had been released because Vietnamese law precluded the involuntary commitment of mental patients for over a year. However, in our many discussions with officials on this case -- including the Dong Nai police and the director of the mental hospital -- there was no mention made of any limit on involuntary incarceration. The director of the mental hospital went as far as to tell us that Truong could be held indefinitely so long as he remained "delusional." What likely impelled his release was the impending travel of a high-level Dong Nai provincial delegation to the United States to promote investment in the province. We recently had warned provincial leaders that -- should the issue remain unresolved -- they would have to answer the embarrassing question of why Truong was locked up in a mental hospital.

5. (SBU) Comment Continued: We are encouraged that the months of engagement and pressure in Hanoi, HCMC, and Washington led to Truong's release. Unfortunately, Truong's acknowledgement of mental illness as a precondition for release makes him vulnerable to future official action against him, should he again "get out of line." We will continue to monitor closely Truong's status as well as to tell our official contacts that we hope that this incident was an aberrant "one off" in Vietnam's handling of religious freedom and freedom of expression cases. We also have urged Truong to work with his lawyer to petition the authorities to obtain a copy of the minute and to challenge any legal irregularities in the release process.

WINNICK